



Fatalities #1, #2, and #3 - January 22, 2003
Explosion - Underground - West Virginia
McElroy Coal Co. - McElroy Mine

COAL MINE FATALITY - On Wednesday, January 22, 2003, at approximately 1:00 am, three miners were fatally injured and three other miners were injured when an explosion occurred near the bottom of a vertical shaft sinking operation. An independent contractor was developing the shaft. The fatally injured miners included a 23 year old Lead Miner with a total of 10 months shaft-sinking experience with this contractor, a 47 year old Mechanic with 2 months experience at this shaft site, and a 37 year old Driller with a total of 2-1/2 weeks of shaft sinking experience. The miners, including the foreman, were working on an elevated work deck, attempting to remove corrugated metal that was blocking access to the water ring. The shaft was approximately 950 deep and within 30-50 feet of intersecting the coal seam.



Best Practices

- Conduct proper examinations for methane before performing any work that could create an ignition source. Use extendable probes or pumps with methane detectors as necessary to reach high spots.
- Provide adequate training in the use of handheld gas detectors including the use of probes, and on the characteristics of mine gases.
- Design and construct water rings so as to minimize the accumulation of methane.
- Provide a means of safely accessing water rings, after construction, without cutting or burning.
- Always use non-sparking tools when working near potentially flammable or explosive methane atmospheres.

These are the 1st through 3rd fatalities reported in calendar year 2003 in the coal mining industry. As of this date in 2002, there was one fatality reported in the coal mining industry. These are the first fatalities classified as Explosion in 2003. At this time in 2002, there were no fatal accidents classified as Explosion.